



## Who is considered to be most at risk for infection from influenza?

Dear Medicare Beneficiary

Influenza (*flu*) season will soon be arriving again, which means it is time to think about helping to protect your family's health through influenza vaccination. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that the following groups receive annual vaccinations<sup>1</sup>:

- **People at an increased risk for influenza-related complications**
  - Adults 65 years of age and older
  - Residents of nursing homes and other chronic-care facilities
  - Individuals with certain chronic medical conditions\*
  - Women who will be pregnant during influenza season
  - Children 6-23 months of age
- **Individuals ages 50-64 years**, because this group has a higher rate of certain chronic medical conditions\*
- **Individuals who live with or care for people at high risk** (such as health-care workers and household contacts who have frequent contact with people at high risk and who can spread influenza to those at high risk)

In addition, the CDC recommends vaccination for anyone 6 months of age or older who wishes to reduce the likelihood of becoming infected with influenza or spreading it to others.<sup>1</sup>

You *cannot* get influenza from injectable vaccine because its source is a virus that has already been killed. In addition, you should be vaccinated every year because the vaccine is updated annually with different strains of influenza virus that experts believe will be most likely to infect the population, and immunity decreases the year after vaccination.

\*Ask your doctor if you are uncertain about which diseases or conditions may increase your risk. Some examples include heart or lung problems (such as asthma), brain disorders (such as seizures), spinal cord injuries, or use of long-term aspirin therapy by children and adolescents 6 months-18 years of age (because they might be at risk for developing Reye's syndrome).



## Helping to prevent the spread of influenza

Along with vaccinations, you can help protect your family from influenza by maintaining good health and proper hygiene. Keep these points in mind when influenza season kicks in:

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Wash hands often with soap and water.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth to prevent spreading germs.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when sneezing or coughing.
- Get enough sleep, water, healthy foods, and exercise.

Remember, nobody wants to get influenza and there *are* ways to help minimize the chance of being infected. If you are planning to be vaccinated, keep in mind that the best time to do so is during October or November.<sup>1</sup> But, if you miss the earlier opportunities, vaccination can be given anytime through March.<sup>1</sup>

Sincerely,

Jennie Deese  
Director of GeorgiaCares

***P.S. Don't forget to schedule an influenza vaccination for anyone in your family who may be at an increased risk for influenza complications or who may spread the disease to someone with other health problems.***

**Reference:** 1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Prevention and control of influenza: recommendations of the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP). *MMWR*. 2005;54:1-40.